National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Great Smoky Mountains National Park
107 Park Headquarters Road
Gatlinburg, TN 37738

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National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Comments about the study can be directed to:

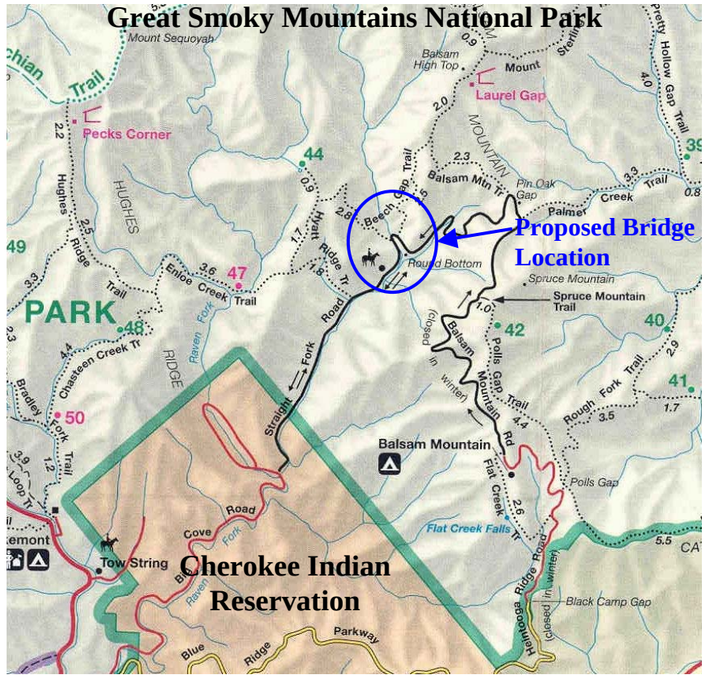
Superintendent
Great Smoky Mountains
National Park
107 Park Headquarters Road
Gatlinburg, TN 37738

Email:
grsm_superintendent@nps.gov

Website:
www.nps.gov/grsm/pphtml/documents.html

The National Park Service cares for the special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.

Project Location Map



Existing Low-Water Crossing

Proposed Bridge Location

GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
FOR
CONSTRUCTION OF STRAIGHT FORK BRIDGE

Project Number: PRA-GRSM 105(1)

Introduction

The Great Smoky Mountains National Park, in cooperation with the Federal Highway Administration, is preparing an Environmental Assessment (EA) to evaluate the construction of Straight Fork Bridge near Round Bottom located in Swain County, North Carolina. The document is being prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act and the regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality (40 CFR 1508.9). The intent of the EA is to describe the Park's existing environmental resources that could be affected by the proposed alternative and present an analysis of potential environmental consequences. Currently, the Park is developing impact topics that will be utilized in analyzing potential effects. The public is invited to comment on ***impact topics and the scope of the Environmental Assessment***. Public participation ensures the National Park Service (NPS) fully understands and considers the public's interest as part of their national heritage, cultural traditions, and community surroundings. The EA is anticipated to be released for public review in June 2004. Scoping comments should be received by the NPS on or before May 20, 2004, and sent to:

Superintendent
Great Smoky Mountains National Park
107 Park Headquarters Road
Gatlinburg, TN 37738

Project Overview

This EA addresses the plans of the NPS to construct a bridge over Straight Fork in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Swain County, North Carolina.

The location of this proposed project is along Roundbottom/Straight Fork Road, a gravel roadway. The existing Straight Fork low water crossing requires motorists to drive through swift flowing water on a narrow submerged concrete slab placed in the streambed. Utilization of a ford crossing through an active waterway has inherent risks associated with it. High water conditions can occur within this waterway year round with little or no warning to the Park or those visitors using the ford crossing. Visitors approaching the ford during high water conditions, or during heavy flow periods, are often faced with impassable conditions. The approach road from the east (Heintooga Ridge Road/Balsam Mountain Road) is a one-way road toward this crossing and visitors are reluctant to turn around and drive 13 miles out in the wrong direction. Rather than doing this, visitors often forge the ford through high water conditions placing themselves in danger. Additionally, a severe storm in May 2003 caused part of the ford to settle approximately 8 inches causing the ford to become impassable to most vehicles. The Park has since placed larger stone material and gravel in order to level out the ford, permitting automobiles to once again cross the stream. In addition to threats posed to the visitors, the waterway itself is jeopardized by the presence of materials found in all motor vehicles: gasoline, oil, grease, transmission fluid, radiator coolant, air conditioning propellant, etc., as well as the constant replacement of gravel needed to maintain the deteriorated ford.

The Park's goal in selecting a preferred alternative is to protect the waterway from harmful chemicals as well as provide a safe way for motorist to cross the stream. Although safety was the major concern, serious thought and effort were given to preserve the Park's natural and cultural resources by minimizing impacts to the environment. The proposed alternative would propose to build a new bridge adjacent to the existing low water crossing, as well as create two small pull offs, one on each side of the bridge. The new bridge would utilize a previous road alignment in order to minimize impacts to the environment.

The majority of construction is proposed to occur during winter months, the time when the road is routinely closed. Working during these months would prevent any problems associated with additional or unscheduled road closures. Any work that would be required outside of the usual winter road closures would be structured to allow Roundbottom/Straight Fork Road to remain open to traffic. The bridge construction would take place adjacent to the low water ford, which would remain in place until the new bridge is complete. The work required to change the new traffic pattern over to the bridge would again occur during winter months, in order to minimize impacts and inconvenience to Park visitors.

Approach

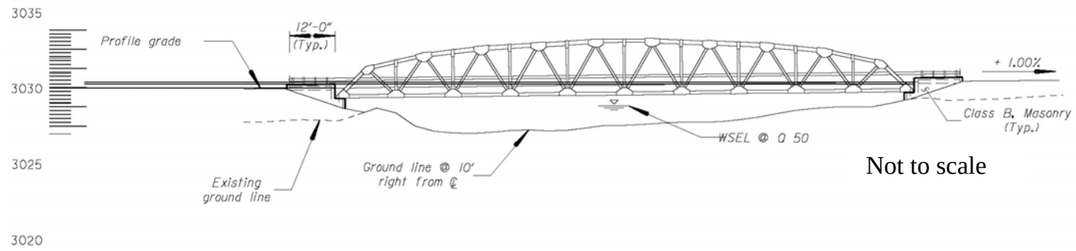
The intent of the EA is to address the potential direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts to Park resources which may result from implementing the proposed actions.

Specifically, the EA will evaluate the potential impacts associated with disturbance of approximately 0.4 acre of Park land. The EA will also analyze potential indirect and cumulative impacts of the project on specific park resources (i.e., water quality) not necessarily limited to the 0.4 acre of proposed disturbance.

Impact topics identified by the National Park Service appropriate for the EA include:

- Water Resources
- Vegetation
- Soils
- Wildlife
- Air Quality
- Noise
- Floodplains
- Archeological and Historical Resources
- Visitor Use and Experience
- Threatened and Endangered Species or Species of Concern

Profile View of Proposed Bridge Structure



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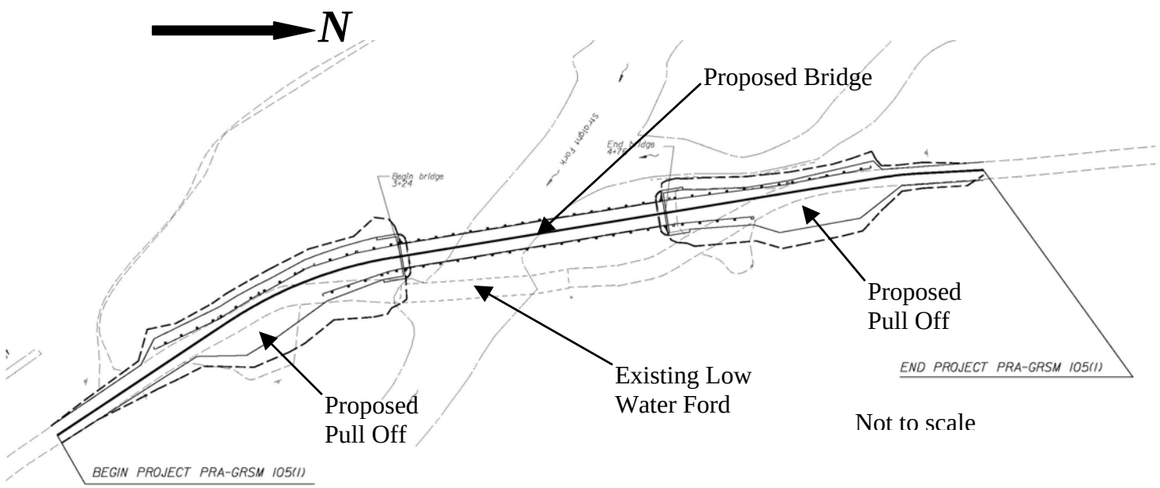
Plan View of Proposed Bridge Structure



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